Climate change a threat to national security, experts say; Climate change presents U.S. with national security risks: [Food shortages, floods and pandemics could trigger global instability 1]

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

"It gets real complicated real quickly," said Amanda J. Dory, the deputy assistant secretary of defense for strategy, who is working with a Pentagon group assigned to incorporate climate change into national security strategy planning.

Ms. Dory, who has held senior Pentagon posts since the Clinton administration, said she had seen a "sea change" in the military's thinking about climate change in the past year. "These issues now have to be included and wrestled with" in drafting national security strategy, she said.

"We will pay for this one way or another," Gen. Anthony C. Zinni, a retired marine and the former head of the Central Command, wrote recently in a report he prepared as a member of a military advisory board on energy and climate at CNA, a private group that does research for the navy. "We will pay to reduce greenhouse gas emissions today, and we'll have to take an economic hit of some kind. Or we will pay the price later in military terms," he warned. "And that will involve human lives."

FULL TEXT

The changing global climate will pose profound strategic challenges for the United States in coming decades, raising the prospect of military intervention to deal with the effects of violent storms, drought, mass migration and pandemics, military and intelligence analysts say.

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Such climate-induced crises could topple governments, feed terrorist movements or destabilize entire regions, say the analysts, experts at the Pentagon and intelligence agencies who for the first time are taking a serious look at the national security implications of climate change.

Recent U.S. war games and intelligence studies conclude that over the next 20 to 30 years, vulnerable regions -- particularly sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and South and Southeast Asia -- will face the prospect of food shortages, water crises and catastrophic flooding driven by climate change that could demand an American humanitarian relief or military response.

An exercise last December at the National Defense University, an educational institute overseen by the military, explored the potential impact of a flood in Bangladesh that sent hundreds of thousands of refugees streaming into neighboring India, touching off religious conflict, the spread of contagious diseases and vast damage to infrastructure.
"It gets real complicated real quickly," said Amanda J. Dory, the deputy assistant secretary of defense for strategy, who is working with a Pentagon group assigned to incorporate climate change into national security strategy planning.

If the United States does not lead the world in reducing fossil-fuel consumption and thus emissions of global warming gases, a growing number of policy makers say, a series of global environmental, social, political and possibly military crises loom that the nation will urgently have to address.

This argument could prove a fulcrum for debate in the Senate next month when it takes up climate and energy legislation passed in June by the House of Representatives.

Lawmakers leading the debate before Congress are only now beginning to make the national security argument for approving the legislation. Senator John Kerry, the Massachusetts Democrat who is the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and a leading advocate for the climate legislation, said he hoped to sway Senate skeptics by pressing that issue to pass a meaningful bill.

Mr. Kerry said the continuing conflict in southern Sudan, which has killed or displaced tens of thousands of people, was a result of drought and expansion of deserts in the north. "That is going to be repeated many times over and on a much larger scale," he said.

The Department of Defense's climate modeling is based on sophisticated navy and air force weather programs and other government climate research programs at NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
The Pentagon and the State Department have studied issues arising from dependence on foreign sources of energy for years but are only now considering the effects of global warming in their long-term planning documents.
Although military and intelligence planners have been aware of the challenges posed by climate change for years, the Obama administration has made it a central policy focus.

A changing climate presents a range of challenges for the military. Many of its critical installations are vulnerable to rising seas and storm surges.
Arctic melting also presents new security problems. The shrinking of the ice cap opens a shipping channel that must be defended and undersea resources that are already the focus of international competition.

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The National Intelligence Council, which produces government-wide intelligence analyses, finished the first assessment of the national security implications of climate change just last year. It concluded that climate change by itself would have significant geopolitical impacts around the world and would contribute to a host of problems, including poverty, environmental degradation and the weakening of national governments.
The assessment warned that the storms, droughts and food shortages that might result from a warming planet in coming decades would create numerous relief emergencies.

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